

Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, Moscow, May 3, 2023

Meeting of the SCO Foreign Ministers Council

As announced during the previous briefing, on May 4 and 5, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will take part in the meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Foreign Ministers Council in India.

The foreign ministers will focus on preparing the agenda for the next meeting of the SCO Heads of State Council, to be held on July 3 and 4 in New Delhi. Among other things, they will review the corresponding draft documents and resolutions. The ministers will also exchange views on topical matters on the international and regional agendas.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is also scheduled to hold a series of bilateral meetings. We will keep you updated on all these developments as promptly as possible.

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Evacuation of Russian and foreign nationals from Sudan

As we have already reported, on May 1, 2023, special flights arranged by Russia's Aerospace Forces evacuated over 200 people from Sudan, including our compatriots and nationals from other countries who found themselves in a difficult situation and turned to the Foreign Ministry and the Russian Embassy in Khartoum for help.

This was a complicated operation with meaningful risks due to the fact that the conflicting forces – the regular army units and the Rapid Support Forces – control various districts of Khartoum, while bands of looters create havoc in the Sudanese capital, sometimes targeting foreign nationals among others. Since the breakout of the armed clashes in Sudan on April 15, 2023, diplomatic missions and staff from Spain, France, Switzerland, India, Morocco, Egypt and several other countries have come under attack.

It is thanks to the professional and coordinated efforts by all Russian agencies and their staff involved in the evacuation efforts, as well as thorough preparations, including coordinating this undertaking with the Sudanese authorities and forces on the ground along the route chosen by the Embassy convoy, that we were able to avoid incidents and enable all Russians to safely return home, as well as help many foreign nationals leave the conflict zone. When I refer to “all Russians evacuated from Sudan,” this does not mean that there are no Russian citizens left there. I am referring to those who planned to return to their homeland.

We would like to emphasise the markedly depoliticised and humanitarian character of the Russian operation by contrast with the obviously discriminatory approach of some countries to the evacuation of Sudan. I would like to talk about this in more detail because we have received many questions about this issue.

We are hearing a lot about humanism and a desire to fight for human rights. However, it is unclear to whom human rights apply. When it comes to specific individuals and destinies, double standards are evident. Our “human rights champions,” for instance, mainly Washington, urgently evacuated only employees of its own embassy and their family members from Khartoum. It postponed the evacuation of private individuals, including Sudanese with dual citizenship or a US green card.

There is one indicative case (it’s already a bad joke) whereby representatives of the Kiev regime ostentatiously refused to take on

the only Russian employee of the Georgian MyWay Airlines during the evacuation of citizens of Ukraine, Georgia and other states with the assistance of the Sudan-based Ukrainian SkyUp.

For its part, the Russian Embassy in Khartoum did not deny seats on evacuation flights to Ukrainian citizens who asked for help. Moreover, for two weeks after the start of the armed conflict, it was in constant contact with them and helped them whenever it could.

This behaviour of the Kiev regime is not a consequence of the special military operation. Don't be under any illusions. The Kiev regime had the same attitude three years ago (in 2020) when citizens of Ukraine and other states were put on evacuation flights because of the covid lockdown. In organising these flights, Russia did not pursue segregation and let all people onto its plane if there were enough seats. Of course, Russian citizens enjoyed priority. We had to provide them with priority service and assistance but if there were vacant seats, we took citizens of Ukraine and many other states.

We recalled more than once that the Kiev regime even banned its own diplomats in some countries from helping Ukrainian citizens board Russian evacuation flights in 2020. This is not about the special military operation and the conflict. This is about the Kiev regime's attitude to human rights, freedoms, human dignity and humanism, for which it is verbally striving. This is about a humaneness that the Kiev regime does not have.

I would like to stress again that the Russian Embassy in Sudan is still open. A number of employees of our foreign mission have returned home, but the Russian Embassy continues its work.

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Ukraine crisis

The day before yesterday, on May 1, the civilised world celebrated the holiday of spring and labour, the International Day of Solidarity of Workers and Trade Unions.

Until recently, Ukraine took part in the celebrations, too. However, in February of this year, as part of the decommunisation policy, May Day was abolished as a “rudiment of the Soviet era.” Clearly, the Kiev regime is unaware of the fact that this holiday came into being long before the Soviet Union was established. (This is speaking of history and how it is being disposed of under the auspices of the Kiev regime). The holiday was established in July 1889 by the Paris Congress of the First International in memory of the Chicago workers’ walkout on May 1, 1886, and is still celebrated in many countries around the world, including in the EU, which Ukraine dreams of joining. By the way, Labour Day is also celebrated in the United States and Canada, but on the first Monday in September, not on May 1.

However, the Kiev regime thinks little of it. Literally, they write history depending on how they feel that day. In its maniacal urge to rewrite history, the Kiev regime is prepared to do anything. It will stop at nothing to “transcode” the minds of millions of Ukrainians or other people who associate themselves with that country, inspire them with ideas of national exceptionalism, superiority and non-identity. What kind of identity can we talk about now that everything that was near and dear to the Ukrainian people has been trampled underfoot in the heat of this political mayhem? After all, managing zombified masses and even more so using them as cannon fodder is a much less complicated effort for Zelensky than delivering on his campaign promises, such as creative labour, work for the benefit of the people, and preserving the genuine identity of the people of his young country.

This is the true face of “Ukrainian democracy,” with Washington’s hidden hand behind it. The rights of workers, just like human rights, have long become a meaningless phrase in Ukraine. I can’t fail to mention it that in celebrating May Day, Zelensky was (in my opinion) much closer to the West than he could imagine, and by all means even

more so than now. All I said above was an outline. Now let's move on to what really matters.

Stripping people of their basic right - the right to life - the Kiev regime continues to shell peaceful Russian cities.

Donetsk, which suffered the most during nine years of Kiev's aggression against the Russian-speaking people of Donbass, is seriously affected by the bombing attacks. There are daily reports about the Armed Forces of Ukraine killing children, women, and elderly people. This in no way diminishes the value of the lives or detracts from the loss of lives of men who are defending Donbass. This is just another stroke to give a fuller picture of what the Kiev regime is all about. They are not making any difference at all. They do not care – not because they have appreciation for human lives. On the contrary, they don't give a hoot about them. Western shells are destroying residential blocks and killing people in the streets of that city. On April 28, Ukrainian neo-Nazis launched a missile strike targeting the central part of the DPR's capital. The US-made HIMARS were used again this time. A direct hit at a minibus killed seven people, including a child.

Where is the West's reaction? Has anyone seen it? Remember, the photos of Syrian children exemplified their humanism. Photos and videos of unfortunate Syrian children swept across London, Paris and Berlin. They were used in election campaigns and political rhetoric in the EU and NATO countries. Later, it turned out that it was either a staged performance or hypocrisy of outlandish proportions. Children in Donbass died for real. Has anyone heard anyone say anything about that? Could it be that we missed the news about a debate at the British Parliament? Or did the Prime Minister of Great Britain report to his lawmakers about the lives of the children that are being killed by the Kiev regime, which is sponsored by the UK, among other countries? No. What they did was they put out a cynical and callous statement saying they had been supplying ammunition with depleted uranium to the Kiev regime for a long time now as if it was some kind of humanitarian aid. What about making reports? They never did that.

Ten more people were wounded at the Republican Trauma Centre, which happened to be in the area affected by the blast. Did anyone in France say anything about it? Or, did associations of investigative journalists say anything about it? No, of course, not.

Militants from the Armed Forces of Ukraine do not balk at using even cruller ways of killing civilians – by planting mines. Four children were wounded by the explosion of a Ukrainian mine in Donetsk. Two of them received very severe injuries. Does anyone know about this in Spain, Portugal or Italy? Or are their media banned from seeing and hearing this? What about North European countries that are so fond of sympathising with the victims of conflicts, issuing them residence permits, supporting them and nominating them for prizes? Or are these children unworthy of prizes? They don't care about prizes. They just need to survive as they have been surviving all these eight years. But this is different. Nobody is interested. These children are not part of the picture painted by Washington-led mainstream journalists in the West.

All of this is happening against the backdrop of events dedicated to the freedom of speech, journalists' rights, anti-fake measures and objective coverage by the media, which are held incessantly in New York, Geneva, and Western capitals by international agencies and different public forums. What objective coverage, journalists' rights and freedom of speech can there be if nobody but us is talking about this? This is regrettable. However, it would be an illusion to think that we do not submit documents to specialised agencies, special representatives, offices of commissioners at international organisations and directly to various associations. We do this every day. We are making every effort to attract attention to this in a bid to wake up the world public at least to some extent. I am primarily referring to the West in this case. They are in a deep lethargic sleep based exclusively on illusions created by the mainstream media. There is not a word of truth in all this. Asia, Africa and Latin America still have alternative journalism. They have not yielded to collective Western pressure on the information space. It is still possible to see and hear something there. I am not talking about the post-Soviet

space. The media coverage of the situation is uneven there but the voice of truth has a chance to break through there. At any rate, we inform our partners in the CIS, CSTO and other integration associations about the situation practically on a daily basis. We include updated information in our daily reports to them. After all, at some point they stand a chance of reaching a deeply dormant but still existing conscience.

The terrorist and subversive activities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine continue gaining momentum. On April 29, a Ukrainian drone struck an oil tank at the oil depot in Sevastopol's Kazachya Bay. It was set ablaze. Representative of the Ukrainian Defence Ministry's Main Intelligence Department Andrey Yusov practically confirmed the Kiev regime's complicity in this crime and said strikes at Crimea would continue. He considers this perfectly normal, something that goes without saying, as if Crimea were a deserted object, an uninhabited territory or a testing ground for fulfilling the Kiev regime's morbid desires or ugly whims. No, there are people in Crimea. They are civilians. They live and work there. Their children go to school. At one time, they escaped from the Kiev regime because they realised what all this would lead to and who was now running the show at Bankovaya Street. Now the current leaders no longer conceal what they were denying for many years, notably, that they want to erase from the face of the Earth everything that did not obey them and was not part of their picture of the world. That said, Mr Yusov advised local people to stay away from military facilities or facilities servicing the Russian Army. An interesting way to frame the issue.

On May 1, 2023, a power line was blown up in the Gatchinsky District of the Leningrad Region. The second explosive device used in the attack was defused. On the same day, a freight train crashed in the Bryansk Region as a result of sabotage. The train was travelling from Gomel, carrying fuel and lubricants and building materials. The locomotive and several cars were derailed. By a lucky chance, there were no casualties among the Belarusian crew.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that today, through our relevant departments and bodies, we received additional information on Crimea and the sabotage activities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

We have taken note of the Kiev regime's another clumsy attempt to shift the blame for the unprofessional operation of its air defence systems to Russia. In the early hours of April 28, while repelling a Russian attack on military targets in Uman, one of the Ukrainian missiles hit a residential building, resulting in the deaths of 17 people. Unfortunately, similar tragedies have happened before but every time the Ukrainian authorities brazenly lie to their fellow-citizens, afraid to admit to them the true reasons for what happened. In fact, it is the Kiev regime trying to behave as if they are the Ukrainian government. It is a lawless terrorist extremist regime conducting relevant activities. The things they come up with every time!

Even more cynical is their attempt to use what happened for propaganda purposes. In particular, the Kiev regime, without a twinge of conscience, described the Ukrainian Armed Forces' terrorist attack on an oil depot in Sevastopol as "God's punishment for Uman." And this is said by those who are waging a fierce long-term fight unrelated to the special military operation. They have been destroying the canonical Orthodox Church for many years, persecuting its priests and believers, violating all norms of morality and Christ's commandments. Ukrainian neo-Nazis have nothing sacred left.

I believe, everything became clear after the tragedy in Odessa. Recently, all of us here who have a memory, consciousness and soul, remembered the victims of the tragedy in the House of Trade Unions. Have you heard anything about it from the Kiev regime? Perhaps, something was said or done in the depths of humanitarian and international organisations? Maybe there was a plea for the Kiev regime to finally find those responsible for that tragedy?

Tragedies and man-made disasters and, unfortunately, cases of extremism and incidents of all kinds that claim many human lives are a daily occurrence around the world. However, some of these tragedies

stand apart not even by the number of lives lost or the scale of destruction, but by the level of dehumanisation of the perpetrators and those who either enabled them or turned a blind eye to the people who stepped over morality or crossed the line. There are no appeals, reports or analytical papers. This is not a PR campaign named “Bucha,” but a real tragedy in the House of Trade Unions in Odessa.

During the years that have elapsed since that tragedy, Russia has been explaining and citing examples of what this line of thinking may lead to in places like this room, at the sites of international organisations, at news conferences, symposia, and international workshops. This is exactly what it led to ultimately. Absolute impunity and immorality, affecting all spheres of life under the Kiev regime, has done something horrible to that country which we are witnessing now.

In turn, Western countries are not hiding their heavy involvement in preparations for a widely publicised counteroffensive by the Ukrainian forces. This goes beyond all rational limits. The transfer to Kiev of the ammo stored in the EU warehouses is in full swing. They have shipped over 600 million euros worth of it, and plans are in place to bring that number to 1 billion euros. The EU countries plan to increase their defence capabilities in order to ship more weapons to Ukraine.

Germany has been trying particularly hard most recently. Its Defence Minister Boris Pistorius announced the delivery of an additional 80 Leopard 1 tanks starting from mid-2023. The Germans will begin training over 100 Ukrainian servicemen to use them soon. Is it clear what kind of heavy equipment that is and who it will be directed at? It’s obvious. The issue is not about training or exchanging experience, but killing people in the conflict zone on both sides. But who in Germany is thinking about it in these terms?

In addition, 31 American Abrams battle tanks will arrive in Bavaria in late May. Within 10 weeks, about 250 Ukrainian servicemen will undergo training to learn how to operate these tanks. According to German media, over 1,000 soldiers from the Ukrainian special

operations forces are being trained at military bases scattered around the country.

Adviser to the Office of the President of Ukraine Mikhail Podolyak, who threatened his compatriots with violent reprisals if they voluntarily obtained Russian citizenship, posted another string of anti-Russian remarks on social media. According to him, any Ukrainian who holds a Russian passport automatically becomes a legitimate target for Ukrainian soldiers. Is that true for passports only? This is a question for Mr Podolyak. What if they find out that someone from Bankovaya Street owns property or a business in the Russian Federation? Will they sort things out with that person? Why the segregation? Why should a person who, perhaps, has nothing else in life but a passport, be punished while other people in Ukraine with multibillion-dollar businesses, incomes, and property in Russia who hold high positions in Kiev get away with it? Why not punish them? Is it because they can bribe their way to impunity only because they have a lot of money? No way. Since you are not willing (I am talking to the Kiev regime now) to return (this is clear) to conventional normalcy, since this process, the way we see it, has become irreversible for you, then be consistent and be the first to come clean. Share with us information about your buried treasures. It's as if no one knows. Rest assured, everyone is aware of it. Instead, you are splitting hairs with the people in Ukraine who are just surviving and have for many years been subjected to Western experiments. Are they next in line? I am not talking about high-stakes politics or human rights, but about the survival of many people.

Clearly, Podolyak failed to understand why people from former Ukraine – Crimea, DPR, LPR, and the Zaporozhye and Kherson regions – refused to be part of it and decided to tie their future with their historical homeland which is Russia. People no longer want to have anything to do with a regime that has no regard for their future and the right to life, and denies them even the opportunity to hold a passport of the country where they may have been born and with which they have close family ties. At the same time, the entire Kiev regime, which denies them the chance to have a passport, is affiliated

with other countries. Some have German or British passports or residence permits which let them stay in those countries for long periods of time and enjoy the guarantees provided by these countries, including Germany, Great Britain, the United States, Canada, and Israel. These people are telling their citizens they don't have a choice. Why?

The developments in Ukraine once again show the timeliness of the special military operation, which, as the Russian leadership has said, will continue and its goals and objectives will be fulfilled.

As we are well aware, and now not only we are aware, there is nothing new about these experiments conducted by the Kiev regime. They have a point when they say that this is not just Nazism, but neo-Nazism, meaning the repetition and revivification of the worst practices of the recent past.

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Book Day in Germany

I will tell you about “book day” in Germany. It is clear what “book day” means to any normal person of today, who lives in a country where people read and visit libraries, including online ones, and where education is based on a knowledge of history as a fundamental, core element. It means the recognition of the role that this part of our civilisation plays in education and the passing down of legacy. Various events take place at libraries, research centres, universities and schools, along with performances and the publication of special books and materials. Today, this has shifted to a new technological basis, so we have flash mobs and hash tags.

While celebrating Victory Day we often tend to forget about a dark date in the history of German culture. Exactly 90 years ago, on May 10, 1933, the National Socialists, primarily young people and students, burnt books that were not to the liking of the Nazi regime on Opernplatz – today Bebelplatz – Square in Berlin and in some other

German cities. This was a barbaric action with a whiff of Nazism. It had been planned in advance by the German Ministry of Propaganda and it was masterminded by Joseph Goebbels, who, incidentally, was a German language philologist by training. This initiative was the culmination of the Nazi-led campaign to exterminate literature that was not consonant with the “German spirit.” Does it not remind you of something?

For how many years has the Kiev regime been updating the lists of banned Russian books that cannot be brought to Ukraine? What books were included in these lists of banned literature? Were they books on history only? No, there were also books for children and cookbooks. They banned everything they could, indiscriminately.

Ninety years ago it took only one day to destroy over 25,000 volumes by foreign and German writers, including humanist philosophers. Later, during the Nazi rule millions of books were destroyed. I will tell you even more: this had become a matter of national pride. This was done not out of necessity, against their will, because they realised that the cost had to be paid. They just took pride in it. Millions applauded this. They believed this was the right thing to do.

The same is happening today. The more absurd and barbaric the steps taken by the Kiev regime with a seat on Bankova Street, the more they believe in their own imagined “greatness.” The more sinister the picture they paint with similar actions that they think up and carry out, the more they believe in their exclusiveness; and not only do they insist that they are right but they also insist on their immunity to conviction in all respects – from legitimacy to morality.

Let’s go back 90 years. Book burning became a dark omen confirming German writer Heinrich Heine’s terrible prophecy. More than a century before it all happened, he said that book burning is inevitably followed by the mass burning of people. This is how it happened. This is what is happening on Ukrainian territory. Isn’t that so? Of course, the scale and the circumstances are not the same. In fact, it became even more spine-chilling and terrifying. Nazi Germany did what no one had

attempted before, at least for several centuries. As for the Kiev regime, it acts while fully cognizant of the fact that there were the Nuremberg trials which dotted the i's and crossed the t's to condemn fascism and Nazism. But still the Kiev regime is repeating everything with extreme precision and without missing any details.

After the war, Germans had to repent their adherence to the barbaric human-hating Nazi ideology and its crimes, including for fighting unwanted literature. Since 1947, Free Book Day has been observed in Germany every year on May 10 as a reminder of the Nazi book burning campaign in 1933. There is a monument in Berlin representing empty bookshelves installed below the pavement level and covered by glass. Imagine anyone in Germany venturing to suggest that this monument has no artistic value? Or suggesting that it be demolished. What would happen to this person? In present-day Germany, this person would stand accused of all the deadly sins, ostracised, cancelled and condemned, etc. But this is exactly what has been happening on Ukrainian territory for decades, while Germany supplies tanks and sends people there presenting them as trained experts, who in fact are Ukrainian and foreign militants. How did the collective West happen to be suffering from this extreme case of double consciousness? In one way or another, at least on the face of it, they still assume their moral responsibility for the dark periods in their history by erecting monuments and protecting them. If, God forbid, it occurs to anyone to desecrate this monument by spilling paint over it or writing anything on it, the German law enforcement agencies would launch an investigation to find the perpetrator, who will have to go to jail. I am certain that the perpetrator would not get away with a fine. The perpetrator's name would resonate, in the most gruesome way, across the country, including in schools and kindergartens. Not to mention universities and other social institutions. There would be lessons on how not to behave and how low adepts of this destructive ideology can fall. However, this is a norm for other countries Germany sponsors in every meaning of this word. Germany has never been on record for condemning, censuring, or holding accountable or even saying anything at all to countries demolishing monuments to the

heroes of World War II and the Great Patriotic War. There are quite a few countries of this kind in Germany's neighbourhood, bordering Germany or located nearby. Do I have to name them? Here they are: Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and all the Baltic states. Ukraine is another glaring example.

But not all have learned this terrible historical lesson. Neo-Nazi's in present-day Ukraine have taken on board Nazi Germany's experience in fighting unwanted books. It seems that in doing so Kiev decided to go beyond what Nazi Germany did, at least in terms of the scale and grandiosity of this campaign. Today's Ukrainian authorities have proudly announced having already destroyed several tens of millions of books, most of them in Russian. Let me emphasise that this is something that makes them proud. The same happened back then, 90 years ago. They later repented their actions and assumed responsibility for them, and had to live in infamy for what they did for several decades. At the outset, however, they were proud of what they did. Not only did they view their actions as an achievement, but believed that only the chosen ones could accomplish this mission. This is not about a system of any kind. They are purposefully destroying everything written in Russian, even the classic Ukrainian literature translated into Russian. This was their decision. However, this effort did not begin one year ago. Have you forgotten their quotas for radio stations and television channels? They were introduced a long time before that. There were quotas for using the Russian language. Just think about it. It would never occur to people using collocations like "human rights," "freedom of speech," or "minority rights" that there is a country in the centre of what they believe is a civilised world or civilised Europe that has quotas on using a certain language for reasons other than affirmative action, when the quotas are not about restricting the use of minority languages but promoting them. I would not call Russians an ethnic minority in Ukraine. This would be an absurd thing to do. Either way, this term does exist. It would never occur to anyone that there could be quotas for a language people there have been using for as long as anyone can remember. We've

seen this over the past years. And now they've burnt several tens of millions of books.

Publishing works by world-famous Russian classics has been banned and these authors – Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Ivan Turgenev – were all purged from Ukrainian schools. Once again Heinrich Heine's prophecy I mentioned has come true, the only difference being that neo-Nazis in Ukraine started burning people right away, so that these two processes unfolded simultaneously. It happened nine years ago in Odessa, on May 2, 2014, at the Trade Unions House.

I am certain and there is no doubt that there will be an end to Kiev's neo-Nazi craze. The designs of those who took the people of Ukraine hostage and have been using Goebbels-inspired propaganda methods to alter the national identity and alienate those who form a single whole, both in past and present, will never materialise.

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Nord Stream update

We are keeping a close eye on the developments related to the investigations into the acts of sabotage against the Nord Stream pipelines in September 2022.

So far, no one has answered the question of who is to blame for what happened, which, in part at least, is attributable to the obvious lack of political will in Germany, Denmark and Sweden to ensure the transparency of the investigations they are carrying out at the national level. We have said time and again, this is impossible without reaching out to the competent Russian federal agencies and Gazprom specialists.

Let me remind you that there has been no meaningful response to our messages, including the October 5, 2022 letter from Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Mikhail Mishustin and Foreign Ministry notes.

The collective West has been toeing this unconstructive line intentionally, as clearly demonstrated by the Foreign Ministry of Sweden's response to our note dated April 12, 2023. The Russian Embassy in Stockholm received this response in late April, 2023. In our note, we had stressed the urgent need to be informed about the progress in establishing the circumstances of the terror attacks against the pipelines and identifying those who were involved in them. We also called for an inclusive international investigation into these acts of sabotage in which specialists from Russia must be involved. All we got from Sweden yet again was a formal response that did not go beyond referring to earlier correspondence.

We are caught in a typical vicious circle. Unfortunately, we are witnessing a theatre of the absurd instead of dialogue. This conversation lacks any substance, and I am not even mentioning the investigation or our involvement in it or working together with the countries who announced their intention to investigate these incidents. They are doing everything to make sure that these actions are not transparent.

The mass media in these countries, and I am primarily referring to Germany, Denmark and Sweden, as well as the media outlets in other countries, have been proactive in supporting this position. It is rather obvious that they have been spreading these groundless Russophobic insinuations at the initiative of their military and special services.

Here is the latest of these planted stories. Dagbladet Information, a Danish newspaper, citing the country's military, reported that a Russian military ship, the SS-750, was in the area where the pipeline explosions took place four days before the incident. The newspaper alleged that it could have had equipment on board, including a mini-submarine, for carrying out special operations on the sea bottom. The article went on to say that the Danish special services have photos of

the Russian ship. For some reason, they have all been silent on this matter and it is only six months later that they come forward with these revelations after people demanded that they change tack.

It would be quite natural for any journalist or ordinary people, the readers of any print title, to ask them to produce these photos. But the Danish special services have a way of dealing with enquiries of this kind: the Danish Armed Forces command does not intend to release these images to the public. Do you know why? It is not even funny. This whole conspiracy theory is based on these photos, but the Danish secret services refuse to release them because of their sensitive nature. I think that this is more akin to a sequel of the Kikoriki children's animated series, known in Russia as Smeshariki.

It is quite obvious that allegations of this kind do nothing to establish the truth. On the contrary, they are designed to sow even more confusion. This is old-school misinformation: they plant information completely at odds with reality in order to give people the impression that, first, an investigation is underway, and, second, that the relevant competent – supposedly competent, but we know what they are worth – agencies are at work. People want to see results, a lot of money was invested in these projects, and everyone involved in them incurred major short-term, medium-term and long-term losses, including countries and their people. The third objective is to multiply alternative versions to make sure that people look the other way. This is why this entire “information campaign” was launched.

I would like to put an end to speculations spread by our NATO colleagues. This information can be freely accessed. Strange that it is not available to the journalists, let alone the Danish Navy.

This is to inform the ignoramuses: Between September 19 and 24, 2022, the Baltic Fleet was drilling practical measures at the Baltic Sea naval ranges as part of a preplanned exercise. Forces and assets of the Baltic Fleet involved in the planned exercise during the period indicated could not (let me underscore this twice for the benefit of all those in Denmark) be present in the area where the putative terrorist

attack on the Nord Stream 2 pipelines was to be perpetrated because of the vast geographical distance between this spot and the naval training ranges.

We must understand that there are facts and data and there are also huge gaps in education. You may remember that German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock once declared that there were countries separated by a distance of several hundred thousand kilometres. There are no such countries.

Well, there are such countries, of course, but then you have to circle the Earth several times, depending on how many hundred thousand kilometers separate these. There are the data, facts, and logic, there are after all numerous computer programmes and applications that can calculate all this. Moreover, the entire body of information has been published and is within reach. But there are also these gaps. Obviously, it is too difficult a word for our Western “non-partners.” They do have gaps in education that make it easy for them to feed the rubbish they publish in their mass media to their own audiences.

The Baltic Fleet’s combat training took place in southeast and central areas of the Baltic Sea, whereas the blown-up Nord Stream 2 pipelines are near Bornholm Island (Denmark) in the western part of the sea.

This area (Bornholm Island) is within the exclusive economic zone of the Kingdom of Denmark, where the Baltic Fleet cannot operate by definition in keeping with the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea.

The fact that the Western media are awash with a new “version” (that is being palmed off as “sensational”) on Russia’s alleged “involvement” in the Nord Stream 2 blasts, a version that pops up more than six months after the actual event, is direct evidence of the West persisting with its campaign of disinformation that is meant to prevent the public from identifying the true masterminds behind and perpetrators of this act of international terrorism.

It would be right for the journalists in Denmark, Germany, Sweden, etc., who write on these subjects, to ask their own state authorities, secret

services and relevant agencies: “Is it only in April and May 2023, six months after the terrorist attack, that you have learned about the Russian Baltic Fleet’s announced and executed exercises in the Baltic Sea? Was this information ‘inaccessible’ before that?” Local journalists should ask the Danish authorities what they are paid for, if they failed to notice this obvious and published fact.

And this question should be addressed not only to the authorities of the abovementioned countries but also to journalists, who reprint all this stuff and fail to ask the simplest, the most elementary and banal questions.

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Mass riots during Labour Day celebrations in France on May 1, 2023

We have been watching the mass demonstrations against the pension reform law, which have been going on for several months now. The law, promoted by the authorities, has caused widespread controversy in society.

This is an internal affair of France but there are a number of matters we should take note of. We are seeing that the national government’s decision to use its constitutional right to adopt the law without voting in parliament only fuelled the protests. Tensions were running high and this year the traditional May Day demonstration developed into riots accompanied by multiple arson attacks, and acts of vandalism, with looting in major French cities, including Paris. In turn, the response by the police and gendarmes was also tough. As a result, hundreds of people were arrested and wounded, including law enforcement employees.

Having seen all that, I wondered whether a state can call itself a beacon of human and humanitarian rights and freedoms if its citizens on different sides treat each other like that (importantly, they are not in a state of a civil war; this is a normal situation; a peaceful May Day

demonstration was supposed to take place). Can such a state lecture all others? Has it reached a proper level in terms of harmonising the political, public and social processes at home? Or does it still have room for improvement before lecturing everyone else?

I have no intention of interfering in the domestic affairs of France. I will emphasise for the second time that this is not in the tradition of Russian diplomacy. I am just wondering how justified Paris's regular lectures to various sovereign states are amid such an acute socio-political confrontation and an actual split in French society.

I am not talking about Russia alone although the Elysee Palace is constantly trying to teach us something in public, on social media or at the platforms of international agencies. Every state goes through its own path of development. This is a historical process. It overcomes crises proceeding from its own national interests, traditions and peculiarities. This must evoke respect. To have respect it is necessary to understand this. I think this should be the starting point.

Shouldn't the French authorities focus more on their own numerous and multifaceted problems without looking at others in a bid to find human rights violations, authoritarian trends (as they call them) or other flaws? Take a look at yourselves.

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Russian film festival in Laos

Last week, the Lao People's Democratic Republic hosted a Russian film festival organised by Roskino, the Russian Ministry of Culture, the Russian Embassy and the Russian Centre of Science and Culture in Vientiane. Russian feature and animated films (with Lao subtitles) were screened during the event.

The opening ceremony of the Russian Film Festival was attended by senior officials from the Lao National Assembly, the Lao Ministry of

Information, Culture and Tourism and other Lao agencies and organisations. In their remarks, they stressed that through Russian cinema, the younger generation in Laos is not only learning about modern filmmaking and its development but also getting a better understanding of the Russian soul and national character – something that Lao graduates of Soviet universities who now hold important government posts in Laos know very well.

The festival became a notable event in the country's cultural life, eliciting a broad public response and media coverage. The Lao audience showed a keen interest in Russian films as the screenings were sold out and received a very warm welcome.

The Russian Film Festival in Laos confirmed that Russian cinema and Russian culture in general enjoy great popularity in other countries, and that we have considerable prospects of developing bilateral cooperation in humanitarian affairs.

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The Russian Language Centre in the Republic of Cameroon

On April 25, 2023, the Centre of Open Education in the Russian Language and Russian Language Teaching opened in Douala, the Republic of Cameroon, at the initiative of the Russian Ministry of Education with the support of the Russian Peoples' Friendship University.

On the very first day, the centre launched Russian language courses for Cameroonian youth, receiving more than 100 applications. Over the two weeks of classes, students will be introduced to the general education programmes and take the Russian as a foreign language test for beginners. Students with past experience in Russian were offered an extended study programme and an opportunity to take the Russian language test at the elementary level.

The intensive study programme is based on modern ethno-oriented communicative methods for teaching a foreign language outside the language environment.

A special Russian language course is available for students of the Galaktika Russian International School. The course is suitable for children of primary and secondary school age who have a certain command of Russian and continue learning.

The Centre of Open Education in Cameroon is a project of the Russian Ministry of Education to support and promote the Russian language in foreign countries. The project is aimed at developing and maintaining the mutually beneficial and long-term humanitarian cooperation between Russia and African countries.

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International sport cooperation

The other day, Moscow hosted the General Assembly and Congress of the International Military Sports Council (CISM). This organisation unites 140 countries and is the world's largest sport organisation after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International University Sports Federation (FISU). These events involved representatives from about 80 states (50 representatives arrived in Moscow, and 30 more participated online from Brussels where the organisation has its headquarters).

CISM serves as an example of international sport interaction, free from politics and any external influence. The organisation refused to follow in the wake of biased international officials and to impose restrictions on Russian and Belarusian athletes at the IOC's recommendation. Consequently, the athletes continue to take part in various competitions among service personnel with their own flag and anthem.

We are delighted to note that common sense and unbiased attitudes are still alive in international sport, the way it should be, in the interests of sport, rather than time serving considerations. CISM activities and the organisation's unfailing commitment to its motto, Friendship through Sport, show that sport remains a unique tool for developing and strengthening human ties, for facilitating mutually respectful communication and for bringing the people of the world together and uniting them.

It is to be hoped that the remaining sporting world will soon be cleansed of the politicisation, imposed by countries of the "collective West."

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The All-Russia Investment Sabantuy Zauralye-2023

On May 25-27, the city of Sibai will host the 5th All-Russia Investment Sabantuy Zauralye-2023. The event has already established itself as a major venue allowing representatives of federal and regional government agencies, Russian and foreign business communities, investors, experts, well-known state officials and public activists to discuss topical issues regarding the economic development of the Republic of Bashkortostan and Russia.

The event is organised by the Government of the Republic of Bashkortostan and the Agency for Strategic Initiatives.

Every year, the Forum involves over 1,000 participants, including representatives of Belarus, Uzbekistan, Türkiye, Kazakhstan and other countries.

Over 1,500 participants from 61 Russian regions, as well as from Austria, Jordan, Türkiye, the United States, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Uzbekistan, France, Italy, Bulgaria and Lebanon attended the 4th All-

Russia Investment Sabantuy Zauralye-2022. They signed over 20 cooperation agreements worth more than 107 billion roubles.

There are plans to hold the 2nd Inter-Regional Forum of Business Sheriffs on the first day of the event. Various themed sessions are to take place on the second day. At the end of the second day, there are plans to hold a plenary session on regions, the main driving force of economic growth.

The participants are to discuss investment through Islamic banks, the localisation of Chinese enterprises under the strategy of expanding partner-like relations, the development of tourism, cooperation between the Republic of Bashkortostan and the Republic of Kazakhstan, logistics and the redistribution of freight flows, as well the national project Unmanned Aerial Systems and many other issues.

The event's partners include the Russian State Duma's Committee on Financial Markets, the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Industry and Infrastructure Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the InfraVEB company, the Delovaya Rossiya (Business Russia) national public organisation, the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry, the Inter-Departmental Analytical Centre, the Innovation Science and Technological Centre/Aerospace Innovation Valley, the Tourism.RF Corporation and the RBC multimedia holding.

We are inviting media outlets to take part in covering the event.

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Foreign Ministry's regional offices take part in festive events

In the run-up to the 78th anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War, the Foreign Ministry embassies, consulates-general and regional offices are taking an active part in various themed campaigns and festive events.

As per tradition, we continue to promote the history of the Great Patriotic War in our social network accounts, as well as the heroic deeds of the Red Army soldiers and the role our country played in liberating Europe and the world from Nazism. As we commemorate these events every year, immersing ourselves in the history of that time, we travel the hard path together with our heroic ancestors in our imagination.

Our foreign missions – embassies, consulates-general, permanent missions and representative offices in Russian regions and Russian diplomats all across the world – have actively joined these efforts to maintain the memory of the Great Victory despite unfavourable, to put it mildly, and sometimes aggressive external factors.

They are holding commemorative events, including as part of the Garden of Memory and the Windows of Victory campaigns. They also organise ceremonies to lay wreaths at the monuments to Soviet soldiers.

The Ministry's central office will host a series of events on May 5, which will be attended by our employees and members of the Council of War and Labour Veterans. In particular, baskets with flowers will be laid at the memorial plaques in the lobby. Then, the Foreign Ministry delegation, led by a deputy foreign minister, will lay wreaths at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier near the Kremlin Wall. A festive gathering then will be held in our building to mark the date.

Together with the regional administrations, the employees of our offices in Arkhangelsk, Novosibirsk, Simferopol, Mineralnye Vody and Yoshkar-Ola will take part in the Garden of Memory nationwide event. Ahead of May 9, 27 million trees will be planted in various Russian regions to commemorate the 27 million people killed in the Great Patriotic War. In St Petersburg, trees have been planted in the park adjacent to the Piskaryovskoye Cemetery.

In Yekaterinburg, together with the Uzbekistani Consulate-General, the presentation of the book, *The Park of Victory: The Philosophy of*

Courage and Resilience, took place. On May 2, a festive concert will be held with the support from the Consulate-General of Azerbaijan.

As per tradition, on May 9, a ceremony to lay flowers and wreaths at the Shirokorechensky Memorial Complex will take place with the participation of officials from the foreign consular offices and honorary consulates accredited in Yekaterinburg.

In Vladivostok, flowers and wreaths will be laid at the memorial of Military Glory of the Pacific Fleet.

The employees of the Foreign Ministry's regional agencies will take part in the St George's Ribbon, The Candle of Memory and A Moment of Silence events.

Diplomatic and consular representatives of friendly countries have been invited to all scheduled events to mark the anniversary of the Great Victory.

As per tradition, all above-mentioned events will be covered by our social network accounts. We invite everyone interested, and, of course, media representatives to monitor the accounts of the central office of the Foreign Ministry, as well as the accounts of Russian diplomatic and consular agencies, permanent missions and representative offices of the Foreign Ministry in the Russian regions.

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Answers to media questions:

Question: In his Atlantico article, French columnist Xavier Raufer said the level of crime in Eastern Europe had increased in the wake of illegal weapons sales from Ukraine. "This process is ignored by the army and the media, and it will be a long and dangerous one. This is of little concern to Washington strategists and should worry European leaders more, because this criminal mayhem will be their problem," Xavier Raufer went on to say. What is your comment on this?

Maria Zakharova: Thank you very much for quoting French authors, columnists and journalists, but, frankly, I would like you to cite us as well.

We have been discussing the issue of all types of weapons supplied to Kiev disappearing and then surfacing somewhere else for more than a year now as it was happening. Before that, we covered this in various aspects as well, but it's been a year now that we have been talking about what is going on in real life and will be happening in the short term. Everything we have been talking about for a long time (we revisit this issue literally every day) has come true.

Interestingly, not everyone in the West (to put it mildly) wants to see this. It is clear why Washington does not want to see this, since this is part of their strategy to destabilise the situation in Europe. It's obvious. However, EU officials, representatives, and political movements who are at the helm and have access to corresponding information are looking the other way, too, and it's not clear why. I think that the usual answer will work here as well: some of them are proxies or conductors of Washington's will and others, clearly due to political circumstances, prefer to remain silent, oblivious of where this silence will take them.

Ironically, weapons of all kinds, including heavy weapons, made it to European black markets a long time ago. What are these black arms markets? You know well this is not about some kind of a field of dreams, a garden or a backyard where the situation can be controlled one way or another. Speaking of weapons, the black market is everywhere because of the internet which offers an opportunity to use blockchain to acquire technology through online information chains that are not controlled by governments or special services.

It includes organised crime, drug trafficking, human trafficking, robbery, thuggery and, among other things, the transshipment of all this to other parts of the world. Some things remain in the EU, some go to other places. Clearly, they are under an illusion that this transit part will not affect them. They lived in this illusion when they were creating the Arab Spring with their own hands, destroying Libya, or

trying to occupy Syria. Later, they had to come to their senses when tens, hundreds of thousands, and millions of migrants showed up at their doorstep with their problems and woke them up. Then, they were compelled to move from their illusory world to the real world.

We never stopped talking about it. In particular, I covered this extensively during our briefings on January 12 and February 17 this year.

The unchecked flooding of Ukraine with weapons by Western countries has provoked a sharp increase in crime rates not just in Europe, but around the world as well. Ukraine was being flooded with weapons long before the special military operation in Ukraine began. It started with the illegal coup in February 2014 and continued through December 2021, and then the speed and the scale of supplies simply shot up. Even before the special military operation, Kiev received about \$70.5 billion in military assistance. Please note that this was done before the special military operation. According to experts, control over weapons supplies was woefully weak, if any. You could see it with your own eyes when the United States and Brussels with its NATO and EU headquarters had, at some point, run out of patience with ongoing corruption that is rife on Bankova Street and its affiliated structures. They requested an investigation into it. Certain materials were published followed by resignations, criminal cases, persecution, and so on. They have just scratched the surface of the corruption schemes. No one went deeper to focus on weapons supplies. I think it's one network. Accordingly, this led to Ukraine becoming a "grey zone," from which lethal weapons made their way to other unstable regions in the world.

Over the time of the special military operation carried out by the Russian Federation, the amount of military aid sent by Western countries to Ukraine was truly unprecedented. The number of US-made and other Western weapons made available to Ukraine is in large excess over what the West supplied to the Mujahideen during 10 years of war in Afghanistan.

Kiev's irresponsible decisions concerning mass distribution of firearms to the population, and military products supplied to Kiev by foreign countries ending up on the shadow market lead to them leaking into the hands of criminals and terrorists. Everyone has remained silent about this. Where will these terrorists head next? The poorest regions of the world? Probably, there as well. But their primary goals and objectives are altogether different.

Ukrainians have posted many online offers to sell weapons and ammunition that they received. Transactions are made using crypto currencies, and terrorists, extremists and criminal groups are getting hold of the weapons. Without a doubt, this will strongly catalyse the redistribution of criminal spheres of influence and mafia wars, in which new criminal group associations will take part.

However, the idea that it will stay there and that it is some kind of a fenced in area which law-abiding and respectable people will never get inside of and will remain outside of it forever is a delusion and a mistake. I would even say it's a crime to think so and to let the public believe that. Criminals, terrorists, and extremists use it not only against each other, but against civilians, society, and the state.

It appears that the resale of weapons on the black market does not bother the collective West too much. The US defence industry which, in defiance of common sense, is trying to turn some profit from the crisis is the key beneficiary here.

The key threat is that terrorist and criminal activities may take on unprecedented proportions, especially so if, along with firearms, they lay their hands on other weapons like the Stinger MANPADS and Javelin ATGMs. You can imagine the scale and the consequences of that. Karl Marx said it all: morality ceases to exist whenever there is profit to make. We are not even talking about morality here, but rather about common sense in the context of one's own safety and well-being.

Apparently, certain amounts of money tend to atrophy some sensory organs.

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Question: How is the situation around the “grain deal” developing?

Maria Zakharova: Representatives of the concerned parties (Russia, Türkiye and Ukraine), as well as the UN, maintain permanent working contacts at the Joint Coordination Centre in Istanbul. They maintain this working level on a regular basis. This is needed for conducting inspections under the agreed-upon procedure.

The sides are currently discussing the possibility of holding a high-level meeting during the upcoming period. We will confirm this as soon as possible, after the meeting’s date and format are coordinated.

Everyone knows our assessments regarding the fulfilment of the Black Sea Grain Initiative in tandem with the memorandum between Russia and the UN Secretariat on promoting Russian agricultural products and fertilisers to the global market. Sergey Lavrov discussed this in great detail during his recent visit to New York City, at his meeting with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and at a news conference.

I can say that, on May 5, Moscow will host the next round of consultations on fulfilling the memorandum. They are to involve a Russian inter-departmental delegation and UN representatives headed by Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Rebeca Grynspan Mayufis.

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Question: Today, Foreign Minister of Türkiye Mevlut Cavusoglu said that there were plans to hold a meeting of the Turkish, Russian, Syrian and Iranian foreign ministers in Moscow on May 10. Can you confirm this information?

Maria Zakharova: We are preparing the meeting. It is too early to talk about a specific date and venue.

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Question: There was an attack on the Russian Centre for Science and Culture in Cyprus. A Polish air carrier did not allow Russian tennis player Vitalia Dyachenko to board its plane. There are many other cases of discrimination and Russophobia. Last year, the Russian Foreign Ministry published a report entitled “On Violations of the Rights of Russian Citizens and Fellow Citizens in Foreign Countries.” How, in your view, do these problems look today? What is being done to fight discrimination and threats?

Maria Zakharova: Ambassador Kypros Giorgallis of Cyprus will be summoned to the Foreign Ministry today and handed Russian security requirements for our foreign missions.

Since the start of the special military operation, the states of the collective West have been involved in an increasingly rabid Russophobic campaign that is unprecedented in scale and lawlessness. Regrettably, the situation is getting worse, not better. The “hunt” for all things Russian affects not only citizens of Russia but often any Russian speakers. The frontrunners in this sense are Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland.

A remark is in order here. This campaign originated in the NATO-centric bloc, but, for various reasons, it is spreading via different channels beyond the unfriendly countries and to the territory of states with which we have excellent allied relations. But there are situations created by the Russophobic forces, where Russian foreign missions and Russian compatriots come under fire. We are well aware that the authorities in these countries seek to put a stop to and investigate such incidents. Right now, we are talking about the “blast” set off by Washington, London and Brussels, which is sending shockwaves across the globe.

Suffice it to recall the recent notorious move by the Polish authorities in Warsaw with regard to the Russian embassy school, a step taken in violation of all possible obligations in the area of diplomatic relations. You may have heard about our reaction and the summons served to the Polish charge d'affaires ad interim. We will certainly notify you about our response that will follow shortly.

Other widespread practices include dismissals, refusal to provide educational, medical, banking and other services, seizure of property, and bans on participating in sports or cultural events. Attacks, threats, insults and deliberate property damage are also frequent occurrences. Russian experts at universal and regional human rights organisations are also subjected to discrimination.

Information about all these incidents is carefully recorded and included in related Foreign Ministry reports, such as the annual report you have mentioned. Relevant retaliatory measures are being planned and approved.

In practical terms, Russian embassies and consulates remain operational tools for protecting the rights of Russian citizens in the event of their violation, but by and large, they are themselves the targets of this Russophobic campaign. Russian foreign missions have launched hotlines (telephone and online) that help to receive and process hundreds of complaints. Despite considerable personnel cuts engineered by a number of unfriendly countries, Russian diplomats regard implementing these human rights tasks as their priority. Acting on these complaints, they work assertively with the local authorities, primarily foreign ministries of host countries, as well as with human rights bodies. Related international organisations, as well as the media and local human rights entities, are also urged to focus on instances of discrimination.

We actively use available international venues, primarily the UN and OSCE, to draw the international community's attention to Western countries impinging on the rights of Russian citizens and compatriots. We point out that these steps, actions and the Russophobic campaign

as a whole are gross violations of these states' obligations under the key human rights documents, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights covenants, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and other international agreements and treaties.

We call on the Western countries to immediately stop their persecution of all things Russian and go back to implementing in good faith their human rights commitments, including in the areas of anti-discrimination. They are under obligations both to us and to their own people to perform what they have formalised as their national laws and international commitments. They have not cancelled anything and therefore must deliver. Neither concern for political factors nor political superstructures should relieve them of the need to carry out their direct duties and obligations.

We regularly explain to representatives of the compatriot movement abroad what possibilities there are for using supranational human rights mechanisms to protect their interests and cultural identities. We encourage them to apply to UN human rights treaty bodies and to use the potential of the UN Human Rights Council's Special Procedures, specifically that of the HRC Special Rapporteurs on modern forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, minorities and empowerment and protection of the rights to free expression.

The Office of the Foreign Ministry Commissioner for Human Rights, Democracy, and Rule of Law, jointly with the Russian foreign missions, constantly keeps the databases of attorneys and law firms in foreign states up to date. This legal help is available to provide legal assistance to Russian citizens, sometimes pro bono.

The Foundation for Supporting and Protecting the Rights of Compatriots Living Abroad also engages in human rights activities in the interests of the Russian diaspora. Human rights NGOs such as legal aid centres, advice bureaus, and also legal columns in newspapers are available in many countries. Thousands of free legal

consultations are provided and assistance is extended to compatriots wishing to contact law enforcement or human rights organisations, and cases are supported in courts. We would like to stress that the work of countering the discrimination of Russians and our Russian compatriots abroad is of a comprehensive nature. These tasks are taken on not only by the Foreign Ministry but also by a number of other ministries and agencies as well as public organisations.

You can see the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation working with lightning speed and legal precision, whereas not long ago they requested official appeals, information materials, and so on. Today, we work with our colleagues from the Investigative Committee shoulder-to-shoulder on a large number of stories, cases, and offences with regard to Russian citizens abroad and foreign missions, etc.

Results depend not only on our work as a ministry, or on our foreign missions, or on interaction in the inter-agency format. You are well aware of what is going on in countries belonging to the collective West. This is a well-planned political campaign designed to discredit all things Russian and damage everything connected with Russia, the Russian people, and Russian culture.

We have to state that the local law enforcement and special monitoring agencies in Europe and in the collective West as a whole are often quite perfunctory when it comes to responding to requests or complaints from Russians facing discrimination. They frequently receive formal replies or form letters or low-level attention to the matter in question. Occasionally all of this is just ignored.

As our compatriots have told me, many of them are invited for “conversations.” The official might agree that an offence has been committed against them in a NATO country. You people have become victims of criminals. “But you understand in what political context all of this is taking place.” What?! The collective West has said time and again that nothing is above the law and that this is the foundation of Western democracy. Freedom of this and that is okay, but you have to obey the law. They regularly say this.

True, they also said that politics should not interfere with the economy. What is left of all this? Will they deal with the law the same way? I don't even mean international law. The collective West's attitude to international law is clear to everyone. I am referring to their national laws. Suppose newcomers are asked about their ethnic origin or urged to identify the ethnic group they belong to. What continent do they come from genetically? If someone gives a wrong answer from the point of view of the current "political context," and no criminal proceedings are instituted with regard to the offence committed against him, then we are back to where we were 80 years ago. Western Europe has already been through this. Crimes were committed against people but they were not investigated. On the contrary, crimes were encouraged. Why so? On the grounds of ethnic origin! People said their entire family was sent to a ghetto, that they lost their businesses and were evicted from their flats, that they were insulted and humiliated... All of this was being done with the state's blessing and that state was Nazi Germany. The explanation was simple: those people belonged to the wrong ethnic group. Yellow stars were attached to shops, flats, clothes, everything. People were forced to live in ghettos, but this was not the worst alternative, as it transpired later. Next there came the gas chambers. The world has been through this blood and horror. And this is what we are rebelling against. The Nuremberg Trials qualified this as the most terrible crime against humanity that mankind should never commit again.

I would like to stress that we will never ever minimise our effort to protect the rights and legitimate interests of our fellow citizens.

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Question: Recently, nuclear fuel was loaded into the reactor at the Akkyu NPP in Türkiye. France supports Rosatom's Paks-2 project in Hungary. Nuclear energy in other European countries also depends on Russia in terms of technology and fuel supplies. At the same time, Germany insists that the EU include Russia's civilian nuclear energy into the 11th package of sanctions. What does the Foreign Ministry

think of these two contradicting policy courses in the relations between Russia and Europe?

Maria Zakharova: It has long become clear that the sanctions war unleashed by the EU against our country is a crushing fiasco for Europe itself: the sanctions are not damaging Russia as seriously as the West expected and instead are hitting Western countries. It is absurd, stupid and ridiculous. But they like it, I guess.

The shortage and costliness of energy resources are leading to de-industrialisation and aggravating socioeconomic problems in Europe. It is not just our conclusion. We predicted it a long time ago. They have come to the same conclusion. You can read leading Western economists who explain the nuances of this situation. Guided solely by the interests of trans-Atlantic solidarity, EU officials are, in fact, acting under Washington's pressure while remaining less bothered about the actual needs of EU members. The bureaucrats in Brussels will do anything to keep the sanctions flywheel spinning because, in the Russophobic environment they are cultivating, restrictions have long stopped being a foreign political instrument and become an element of domestic policy for the EU. Therefore, when it comes to exerting pressure on Russia, they will follow any suicidal path.

Apparently, they are willing to resort to "economic banditry." You have seen and heard discussions to this effect. There are a host of specific examples and implemented actions. Although representatives of the EU leadership admit that they have almost exhausted their arsenal, Brussels keeps racking its brain over more potential actions against Russia so that our country finally experiences painful consequences. In my opinion, this indicates a splitting of Brussels' political thinking. They are suffering, they are in pain, and yet, they keep inventing something new that they can use to hurt us, even though they are the ones suffering more. It is how children act when they don't like being told what to do: they would rather freeze their ears off than wear a hat. These people have long frozen their heads off if they follow this logic – and now they are acting based on their current physical state.

Now, the Russophobes in the EU are seeking sanctions against Russian nuclear energy. I will try to appeal to their common sense. Regardless of different opinions and disagreements within the European Union, nuclear energy remains a key element of energy security for specific members of the EU and the EU in general. It is regrettable that certain circles in the EU are trying to politicise this part of their energy cooperation with our country, while also clearing their market for American exporters of nuclear fuel and technology.

It is obvious to us that, just like it happened with gas supplies, Brussels will only shoot itself in the foot if it tries to restrict the peaceful atom. Moreover, these attempts will create risks for both reliable energy supplies to European consumers and the nuclear security of several power generation facilities in the EU.

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Question: Russia has ratified a protocol on biological safety cooperation between the CSTO members. Earlier, the Russian Defence Ministry released information about the US Department of Defence-operated biolaboratories in the post-Soviet space. Which neighbouring countries have US-controlled biolaboratories and what steps will be taken in this regard?

Maria Zakharova: Ensuring biological safety has taken on a new sense of urgency internationally in recent years. Through the efforts of Washington, this matter has evolved into a biological security problem as opposed to its previous status of an international biological security issue.

With this in mind, the CSTO member states decided to make this issue part of allied cooperation. In pursuance of the above agreement, President Vladimir Putin signed the Law on Ratification of the Fourth Protocol on Amendments to the CSTO Charter on April 28. In addition, the Coordinating Council of the Authorised Bodies of the CSTO Member States was created last year under the Committee of Security Council Secretaries, which is in charge of biosafety issues. Their first

meeting was held in St Petersburg on December 15, 2022. The next meeting will be held in Minsk in July. Russia is committed to developing in-depth cooperation in the CSTO in this area and is willing to contribute in every possible way to promoting the effective functioning of this new entity.

The multiplying facts of the extremely dangerous and unchecked military biological activities of the United States in various parts of the world, including the post-Soviet space, have made biosecurity a priority for the CSTO. The US's activities raise serious concerns regarding the implementation of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC).

The special military operation exposed numerous facts about the Pentagon and other US agencies using Ukraine, which is not a neighbouring country for them and is located on the other side of the globe, as a testing ground for their experiments with hazardous substances. All of that was done using the Ukrainian Ministry of Healthcare as a front. In fact, these were Pentagon programmes. The Ukrainian Ministry of Healthcare worked for several years not just with the support and the supervision of the United States, but was directly led by a person with the proper citizenship, passport and a track record who was dispatched from North America.

Using the provision of sanitary and epidemiological assistance as a cover, the Pentagon started building or upgrading en masse biological laboratories around the world, including the former Soviet republics. It's impossible to monitor the procedure and the degree of involvement of these facilities in the off-limits military research programmes, because Washington blocked the drafting of a legally binding Protocol to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention in 2001. We have repeatedly stated during briefings and at the level of the political leadership that this work must be conducted within a "transparent framework." The United States and the recipient countries which accommodated these biolaboratories said they could even give anyone willing a tour. There's a difference between an inspection and

a tour. They were talking about visiting the reception area which is, by and large, a reception desk for visitors and employees, that's all.

Accordingly, the findings of US-led research can be used for purposes that are inconsistent with the interests of regional and international security.

The newly exposed facts of the Pentagon conducting its allegedly "peaceful" military biological programmes in Ukraine in violation of the BTWC are another egregious example of dangerous activities of that kind. The information obtained during the special military operation leads us to conclude that biological weapon components were being developed in the immediate vicinity of the borders of Russia and other CIS/CSTO countries. These assessments are corroborated by a recently released report by our parliamentary commission in charge of investigating the circumstances surrounding the creation of biolaboratories in Ukraine by US specialists.

I would like to note that initially, apparently being caught off guard, even high-ranking US officials did not deny the fact that their country engaged in this activity. Months later, when they became fully aware of the size of the problem that would fall to them and the fact that they would have to wriggle their way out of this situation in one way or another, they started denying everything. However, early on they failed to come up with justifications and admitted that they were engaged in these activities.

Numerous questions for Washington regarding the above activities remain unanswered by those who are in charge of monitoring activities. We will continue to work with specialised multilateral platforms (primarily within the BTWC) in order to resolve the situation and have our claims settled.

The situation in Ukraine is a stark reminder of the importance of strengthening the BTWC now and resuming work on a legally binding Protocol to the BTWC replete with an effective verification mechanism. This work must be carried out within the established framework with

a clear result, where a clear result does not mean a tour of the premises or seeing things they want you to see, but inspections and oversight.

We plan to consistently and in cooperation with like-minded countries head towards that goal as part of the new Working Group to strengthen the convention, which was established by the Ninth Review Conference of the BTWC upon Russia's proposal. We will push for implementing Russia's initiatives seeking to strengthen and institutionalise the BTWC.

With regard to biosafety issues, we remain in close contact with our CIS/CSTO partners and hold regular consultations on this matter. We have signed specialised bilateral intergovernmental memorandums of understanding with most of them. Once implemented, they will significantly improve our countries' security and friendly relations and promote cooperation in this area.

This is a sensitive and important area that requires real practical cooperation. I wouldn't like journalists, experts, or political analysts to see it merely as a "set of words from international politicians." This is not about "clicks," but about our lives. 2020 brought us the COVID-19 pandemic and showed us what turns life can take and what challenges humanity can face. It looks like we can do many things and we know a lot, but it takes just a couple of weeks to send the whole world into a state of total paralysis where even its willpower is paralysed, because it is just clueless as to how to proceed. The ripple effect can still be felt. The more concrete the commitment of all those who are dealing with this issue and the less we see this as a game of terms, rewriting papers or some kind of theory, the better.

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Question: Marcin Przydacz, head of the foreign policy bureau under the Polish President, said Poland, which demands reparations from Germany for the Second World War, might later demand them from Russia. He also did not rule out the possibility that the Polish

authorities might begin a dialogue on this issue with President of Russia Vladimir Putin. Have any requests to this effect been forwarded to the Foreign Ministry? What does Moscow think of Warsaw's plans?

Maria Zakharova: I can only say that they will get themselves into trouble.

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Question: Has the Vatican forwarded the peace initiative mentioned by the Pope to the Russian side? What might this initiative contain?

Maria Zakharova: As of today, Russia has not received any concrete proposals or peaceful settlement plans for the Ukraine crisis from the Vatican. We do not have anything, and we do not have any details regarding Pope Francis' initiative mentioned in the Western media.

At the same time, we would like to note that the Holy See has repeatedly expressed readiness to become an intermediary in potential talks with the Kiev regime. We have seen and read all this.

Since the beginning of the special military operation, we have maintained high and the highest-level contacts with the Holy See. We are confident that the Vatican knows our stance regarding the prospects of a peaceful negotiation process on Ukraine.

I will still remind you, maybe there are people who do not know that Vladimir Zelensky prohibited himself and his regime from holding peace talks with our country at the legislative level. This is not the only amazing thing related to these bandits. You perfectly understand that the only thing that guides those on Bankova Street are the opinion, or more precisely, orders and kicks of their Washington masters who are not interested in stopping the hostilities, which they say directly from the tribunes of the White House, the Department of State, the Pentagon and all legislative authorities. Public figures say the same thing. Not all of them. But those who expressed sensible ideas are immediately canceled from the public discussion. You see what they are doing with journalists who are getting fired,

downgraded and disappearing from the air. You see what is happening with economists who try to give some realistic forecasts even for domestic American life. They are also banished from television and threatened that their social network accounts would be blocked. They are threatened using technology, they receive strikes and warnings. This is the background of the Kiev regime's absolute rejection of peaceful talks.

I think that our Vatican partners either know this or will understand it soon. I want to reiterate that there are still people who speculate about the situation in Ukraine, unaware of the fact that Vladimir Zelensky prohibited any talks with our country for himself and his regime.

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Question: As you know, negotiations between the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia on a peace treaty are now taking place at a US venue with the mediation of the US Secretary of State. Today is the third day. It has been announced that the meeting would last for several days. What is your comment? What can you tell us about the prospects for a meeting between the two foreign ministers on Russian territory against this background and, in principle, about US mediation?

Maria Zakharova: The negotiations mentioned at the beginning of your question are taking place without Russian participation, but with the participation of other countries. Accordingly, you should ask the involved parties about the process in question. Following the talks, after the relevant statements have been made and each country has given its opinion, then it will probably be possible to form an impression. Maybe this will give us the right to comment. But that will be later.

We remain committed to the implementation of all the provisions of the trilateral statements by the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia adopted in 2020-2022.

Regarding the prospects for meetings between the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia on Russian territory, as already [announced](#) at the last briefing, Yerevan and Baku have confirmed their willingness to hold them in Moscow. The dates will be announced later.

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Question: Is it difficult so far to talk about expectations? What is the difference in approaches between the Russian and US sides?

Maria Zakharova: I have already answered that question.

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Question: The Days of Moscow start in Baku today. Representatives of the Moscow government have come to visit. A conference, Moscow-Baku: A Dialogue of Two Capitals, will be held, followed by various Russian stage productions and other events. In your opinion, how important are these days of culture?

Maria Zakharova: Such events are quite important in relations between any states. There can be no relations between countries without relations between their peoples. There can be political and economic contacts, but they need the genuine meaning provided by the cultural communication that includes person-to-person ties, as well as cultural, educational and other exchanges.

In the context of our interaction with any state (of course, now we factor in the situation that we call “the policy of unfriendly countries” towards our country) we try to develop and are ready to develop relations with all countries. We did the same with regard to unfriendly states, too, until they conceived the aggressive desire to “destroy” us or “inflict a strategic defeat” on us, as they say. At the same time, as regards civil society, educational projects and cultural ties, some contacts are maintained, though they are not developing at a pace we would like, given the obstacles created by the Western countries. But anyway, this is the be all and end all of interstate relations.

As for relations between Russia and Azerbaijan, they are complemented by our common history and the closeness of our peoples. This shows not only in general state policies, in agreements and programmes, but also in personal contacts at the level of families. I sincerely hope that this trend will continue, not from year to year, or from one decade to another, but from one century to another. I think that our two countries show a fine example of such interaction in various spheres.

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Question: What's your take on French counterintelligence agency Director Nicolas Lerner's remark that Russia might try to infiltrate France's political circles?

Maria Zakharova: I have a counter-question for the director of the French counterintelligence agency Nicolas Lerner: did we interfere in the presidential election in France? This is a concrete and simple yes or no question. The French presidential election is over. Did Russia interfere in it or not? Hypothetical predictions are a bit like reading Tarot cards. This is my first point.

Second, it appears to me that all of that has a Freudian side to it where things are carried under the shirt, or they do some things themselves, or transfer their own thoughts or way of thinking on other people. Statements like this are nothing new to us. The Russian card is played regularly in the West when it comes to political strife. One gets a sense that the weaker the candidate, the more problems they have and the less fitting they are for a particular office, and the more they whip up the anti-Russia hysteria.

Mr Lerner's remarks are yet another compelling example of Russophobia that has taken over the minds of the Euro-Atlantic establishment.

To reiterate, unlike France and a number of other US-led countries, Russia does not interfere in other countries' affairs.

Today, we have commented on things that have prompted many questions. We have received many requests to cover the unrest in France and have stated that this is France's internal affair. Pension reform, demonstrations, and crackdowns on protesters are up to France, its leadership and the people to deal with. We have shown the inconsistency of the public rhetoric that the Élysée Palace tends to use with regard to other countries with their internal procedures for managing such situations. The disconnect is obvious. We encouraged them to deal with their own internal issues.

I would like to remind French counterintelligence and its director that Russia was not behind the colour revolutions in a number of the world's regions starting with the post-Soviet space, etc. It was not Russia that, under the cover of doubtful ideals, has been interfering for 60 years in African affairs, when the African countries began to gain independence and to build sovereign states. It was not our country that infiltrated their political circles, toppled objectionable leaders dozens of times and built a neo-colonial system of influence.

We take attacks like that as another propaganda stunt designed to smear our country and form a negative image of the entire nation, culture, and state. At the same time, it cannot be ruled out that – in the best traditions of the West – this statement is used to prepare grounds for justifying their own setbacks in domestic politics and conveniently attribute all their failures to what they think is the Kremlin's schemes or the hidden hand of Moscow, just the way they like it. There are lots of internal contradictions in France. The whole world has seen the massive internal confrontation between the people of France for many years now. Not between the citizens of France and the citizens of other countries, but between the citizens of France and the people who obtained a residence permit and are now entitled to reside permanently in that country.

As I mentioned earlier, the “Russian trace” is an all-purpose tool that covers all Western mistakes, miscalculations and misfortunes and makes it possible to eliminate political rivals. Truly, a great find.

Unfortunately, we have to state that Europe has returned to the traditions of the dark past and the witch hunt. By the way, this is also a find of theirs. They must be revivifying it.

Importantly, anyone who decides to put into practice France's reasoning about freedom of speech, human rights, or civil liberties, anyone who starts using this mantra in everyday life regrets it immediately. If people begin to exercise their civil rights and think openly, objectively, impartially, and rationally, and express sound thoughts and share their vision of the situation, they are immediately ostracised. Sometimes things get even worse and political pressure quickly brings things down to reprisals. People who do not fit into the anti-Russia mainstream mold created by Brussels, Washington and, unfortunately, Paris, are accused of nothing short of betraying the ideals of democracy, are defamed and considered outcasts. Occasionally, punitive measures are used against them. They are not allowed to speak publicly, intimidated, and dismissed from work. Examples abound.

I will cite another example of French journalist Anne-Laure Bonnel. She faced unprecedented pressure after her February 2022 trip to the DPR and the release of a film about Donbass, in which she presents a perspective on the situation in Ukraine which is alternative to Western propaganda. Gradually, she was pushed out of the French information space. The Sorbonne, the National Audiovisual Institute (INA), and even the supposedly (at least it claims to be such) "independent" Higher School of Journalism (ESJ), where she was a professor, refused to continue cooperating with her. So much for independent journalism. On the face of it, in a country that gave the world the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, one would expect free journalism to remain untouchable.

I would encourage Mr Lerner to watch again (regarding interference in other countries' affairs) the film *Professional* with Jean-Paul Belmondo. Since the burial ceremony with state honours was held to the music from that film, it means official Paris endorses the film and the story it tells.

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Question: President Vladimir Putin said during his last virtual address at the nuclear fuel delivery ceremony at Akkuyu NPP that Russia is determined to increase its cooperation with Türkiye on natural gas distribution to third countries. Has there been any recent work or discussion between the Russian and Turkish foreign ministries on building a gas hub?

Maria Zakharova: The issue of establishing a gas hub in Türkiye to ensure a reliable, uninterrupted supply of natural gas to European consumers continues to be high on the agenda of Russian-Turkish relations.

As for practical negotiations on this issue, they are being conducted through the relevant agencies and companies involved in these infrastructure projects that represent the states concerned. I believe it is up to these agencies and companies to provide substantive comments on this issue.

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Question: Can you comment on a documentary that was aired on central TV in four Scandinavian countries about Russia allegedly having a spy network in three capitals, Copenhagen (Denmark), Oslo (Norway) and Stockholm (Sweden)?

Maria Zakharova: We have "redeployed" this network to Mars. Detailed [commentary](#) was posted on the Foreign Ministry website on April 21.

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Question: Last week, PRC President Xi Jinping had a telephone conversation with President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky. During the conversation, Xi Jinping said China will send a special government representative on Eurasian affairs to Ukraine and other countries for a

substantive exchange of views on the political settlement of the crisis in Ukraine. What do you think about China's role in settling this crisis? What are your expectations in this regard?

Maria Zakharova: We have already published a comment on a similar question on our website. I can repeat its main ideas. We have not changed our position.

We have noted that China is ready to work to move the negotiating process forward. Obviously, our positions of principle are largely consonant with the provisions of the relevant document published by the Chinese Foreign Ministry on February 24, 2023.

At the same time, we believe that the problem is not rooted in the shortage of good plans although they are always welcome. Let me repeat what we have said more than once, including today. For the time being, the Kiev regime is rejecting any sound initiatives aimed at political and diplomatic settlement of the crisis in Ukraine. It is making eventual consent to talks dependent on ultimatums with patently unrealistic demands. That's what it all comes down to. Zelensky personally and his regime have prohibited themselves to hold any talks with Russia.

Before 2022, the Ukrainian authorities and their Western handlers also demonstrated their ability to drag out peace initiatives. But this admission was primarily made by those who guaranteed the implementation of the Minsk agreements by the Kiev regime. Recall the revelations of former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and former French President Francois Hollande. They did this for a reason. These revelations were not backstage conversations that became public through leaks. They were not even a prank. These were on-the-record interviews and statements. These leaders said the Minsk agreements did not work because the "other party" was not going to fulfil them and used them for a completely different purpose. This is yet another example of how those that were obliged to fulfil these agreements trampled them underfoot although they were not just good intentions but a specific plan based on the real analysis of the

situation on the ground and the knowledge of the particular features of the conflict as well as the specifics of the situation. They did this not because they signed something they considered outdated later on. These agreements were part of a UN Security Council resolution that is binding for everyone.

The Western curators and the Kiev regime admitted that for them the Minsk agreements were merely an instrument of dragging out time in order to build up the offensive potential. In the spring of 2022, the same happened with the peace agreements that were almost ready for signing. The sides drafted them at the Kiev regime's proposal. We sent relevant documents to Kiev but received no response in April 2022. Vladimir Zelensky even signed a law banning any talks with Russia. Obviously, any appeals for peace can hardly receive an adequate response from the regime that is not an independent player but a puppet controlled by someone else (in this case, by Washington).

I have seen discrepancies and logical mistakes more than once, not to say flaws in the reasoning of the Kiev regime's American curators when they try to explain their rejection of the communist ideology. I remember well how a US representative spoke on-the-record during an open session of the UN Security Council about the need to fight communism all over the world. Meanwhile a representative of China as a permanent member of the UN Security Council was sitting opposite her. Incidentally, China is led by the Communist Party. But the communists are not in power only in China. They unite more people than any other political party. They form the biggest parties in the world. But the US representative was still trying to explain something to her Chinese counterpart without even understanding to whom she was talking. Zelensky is the same case. Willy-nilly he repeats everything his elder brother says.

Zelensky leads a country that has officially banned communist ideology and party. In addition, he is conducting what they call "the process of decommunisation" in Ukraine. Recently Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada Committee for International Affairs Alexander Merezhko referred to China's ownership of Taiwan as a "communist

delusion”, even though it is recognised by the international community. Does that sound normal? Ukrainian-style democracy imported from the West stands out for its monstrous hypocrisy or probably the absence of elementary knowledge.

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Question: Following the summit on April 26, 2023, US President Joe Biden and the leader of South Korea adopted the Washington Declaration that lays the groundwork for setting up a consultation group on nuclear planning and developing specific plans for nuclear weapon use. After the talks, the American leader also threatened North Korea with changing the regime if Pyongyang attempts to launch a nuclear attack against the United States or its allies. In your opinion, how can this sort of initiatives affect global security?

Maria Zakharova: We noted reports on the agreement reached by the United States and the Republic of Korea on the joint planning of nuclear weapon use. This development can certainly be described as destabilising and it will have serious negative repercussions for regional security and subsequently for global stability.

The United States and its allies in the Asia-Pacific Region ostentatiously indicated a course for duplicating their schemes of extended nuclear deterrence in this region, which are damaging for international security. Washington has practiced these schemes for decades after the end of the Cold War and continues to develop them within NATO, with full support from the other members of the North Atlantic bloc, which declared itself a nuclear alliance.

We are convinced that propagation of this practice by the collective West will not bring anything but rising tensions, growing security crises and a provocation of an arms race.

In pursuit of decisive military superiority, as they describe it, the United States and its allies are implementing a whole range of military programmes undermining global strategic stability. We urge

them to stop exacerbating the situation and refrain from the steps that will weaken the general level of security for all countries.

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Question: What response measures will be taken following the seizure of the Russian Embassy school in Warsaw?

Maria Zakharova: If you want me to give you a detailed answer on the measures that will be taken (first, second, third), then you must realise that such response measures can only be taken and voiced in the public space after a detailed interdepartmental study. It has begun. I can assure you of this. I do not think it is appropriate or even possible to talk about this and list specific measures before it is over.

At the same time, we have said many times that a tough response will be given to everything we see from official Warsaw (not only the fact of the school's seizure, but also its aggressive anti-Russia policy in general). As you understand, we keep our word. We have demonstrated it over and over again. For now, that is all I can say. These are not just words uttered during a discussion, but a policy that was voiced publicly following the summons of the Polish Charge d'Affaires to the Russian Foreign Ministry. Similar information was conveyed to him.

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Question: You have mentioned Victory Day. In many countries, the organisers of the Immortal Regiment march have encountered problems or difficulties with organising the event. We have talked to some of them. For example, in Germany, people were generally afraid to tell us anything. In Kazakhstan, a seemingly friendly country, they are not coordinating the holding of the Immortal Regiment march for the fourth year in a row. First, they said it was due to coronavirus restrictions. They have now been lifted, but they are still not coordinating the event. Is the Foreign Ministry monitoring this situation? Perhaps there will be some response or statement about this?

Maria Zakharova: I have talked about this in my introductory remarks. We not only follow, but take an active part in these events. We have the right to do this as a foreign mission. Moreover, we are talking not only about an event that has priority importance for us (I mean the holiday, the Day of Victory in the Great Patriotic War), but about a world-scale event enshrined in the UN General Assembly resolution and the decisions of the Nuremberg Tribunal.

As a victor country and a leading member of the anti-Hitler coalition, we have the right to celebrate this day all over the world and support all people for whom the idea of anti-fascism is not an empty word, a slogan or a PR campaign, or part of the implementation of prepaid stories, but for whom it is indeed a part of their existence. As to how we will do it, I have already said in the introductory remarks of the briefing.

Speaking about the difficulties the organisers are facing, they did not begin last year but a long time ago. These difficulties, as you call them, are not only related to the opposition from Washington, which uses NATO structures to carry on intrigues, invent counterarguments, and work all sorts of dirty tricks and nasty things. This story is more global: the demolition of monuments, vandalism, making it impossible to visit burial sites, somewhere for political reasons, somewhere due to objective difficulties (the pandemic, the private nature of the burial); anything can happen. Our embassies work meticulously, on a daily basis. Somewhere this is assigned to a certain division of a foreign mission, somewhere it is part of the job of a particular person or is either distributed between the embassy and the representative office of Rossotrudnichestvo, or we do it together with local or national associations of compatriots and public movements that unite the citizens of these countries, I mean foreigners. Everywhere we find our own way to preserve the memory.

We are also carrying out substantive work with the authorities of the countries you have mentioned. This is possible in some countries. Some countries' authorities generally avoid conversation on any issues,

and not just on this one. The range of tasks is clear, but the implementation... Depending on the situation, different tools are used.

I will definitely tell you how and where Russian foreign missions held events, where our foreign missions supported public figures or did something together with them. Follow us on social media. We will undoubtedly make an overview after everything is held.

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Question: The Finnish Foreign Ministry has confirmed that Helsinki is currently negotiating an agreement with the United States that would make it possible to deploy US military bases in Finland. How would the Foreign Ministry comment on this statement regarding Finland's cooperation with NATO?

Maria Zakharova: We consider these plans to be clear evidence that Russia's repeated warnings are coming true: Finland is irretrievably losing its sovereignty. In effect, this process has begun. Perhaps, this was not so obvious in the past, but now everything is proceeding on a full scale. As we have noted earlier, by deciding to join NATO, Finland became one of the Alliance's many member countries that decide nothing. In the autumn of 2022, the media reported that Finland's Foreign and Defence ministries had started negotiating a defence cooperation agreement with the United States. The document aimed to specify the framework and legal grounds for in-depth bilateral defence collaboration, including the possible deployment of US troops in Finland. Consequently, there is nothing new in the Finnish Foreign Ministry's recent statements. It is common knowledge that the United States intends to actively develop Finland's territory for its own purposes. However, Finland and NATO should realise that the deployment of additional troops in Northern Europe only escalates military-political tensions in this region.

We regard any deployment of US military infrastructure closer to Russian borders, both within the framework of NATO and under bilateral agreements with European states, as directly confirming

Washington's officially stated goal of inflicting a strategic defeat on our country.

We are closely following the North Atlantic Alliance's plans with regard to Finland. We confirm that the Russian Federation will be forced to implement reciprocal defence and other measures in order to neutralise threats to its national security arising in this connection. As the Russian leadership has stated, specific defensive measures near Russia's northwestern borders will depend on the deployment of NATO's military infrastructure and offensive weapons systems on Finnish territory.

Question: Finance Minister Anton Siluanov said that the BRICS countries could adopt a single currency, a supranational unit of account. How likely is it that it will appear in the near future?

Maria Zakharova: Considering the current international situation where Western currencies (the dollar and the euro) are being used by the collective West, the NATO-centric countries and their military-political associations as a pressure tool, and even weaponising them in certain areas, more and more countries are thinking about enhancing the role of alternative payment systems and currencies in mutual transactions.

BRICS is acting in line with these trends. Their decisions have no purpose of harming anyone or making a statement. They are prompted by life itself, by an aversion to pressure and disdain for more lies on the part of the West.

For many years, Washington has been claiming that the dollar is not only the US national currency, but a factor, a product, an element of the internal economic space that the United States is ready to provide to everyone to benefit from it, to use in international economic financial cooperation, and the economic activities of international entities. This is the way they made it look. Among other things, it was Washington that insisted that political methods of pressure to resolve economic problems were unacceptable, that political motivation was

to be avoided because it could disrupt the natural course of economic relations, impair competition, freedom of enterprise, market mechanisms, etc.

This no longer seems to be the case. It turned out that Washington had a different plan from the start – to use the situation at critical moments (and maybe not even at critical moments, but whenever it found necessary) as an element of blackmail, pressure, and sometimes as a weapon for achieving its unscrupulous and illegal goals and objectives.

The idea of creating an international reserve currency based on the BRICS currency basket, which could be used for payments between the members, was proposed by President of Russia Vladimir Putin at the BRICS summit on June 23, 2022.

This forward-looking initiative warrants a detailed expert analysis in a five-sided format, because the creation of supranational payment instruments is not an easy process. In any case, issues related to payment mechanisms are in the focus of constant attention of the BRICS countries. We do not rule out that this may be a subject of discussion at the upcoming meeting of the five BRICS leaders in South Africa.

I wish you all the best. Happy Victory Day! It is more relevant than ever, a vibrant and life-affirming event. We will have an opportunity to wish each other all the best again.